A whirlwind year for recent ANS president

By Kimberly Hirai, University of Idaho, Idaho National Laboratory Nuclear Science and Technology communications summer intern

The whirlwinds in Texas have never been a match for Harold McFarlane. He learned early how to steel himself against the worst the Lone Star State could muster when his family moved to Del Rio, Texas, from Maryland right after he was born.

That early life experience surely served McFarlane well over the past 12 months as he tackled a flurry of presentations, dedications, meetings and travel as the American Nuclear Society's 52nd president. Taking a break from his day job as deputy associate laboratory director for Nuclear Programs and director of the Space Systems & Technology Division at Idaho National Laboratory, McFarlane traveled thousands of miles across six continents during his vice presidential and presidential terms. Between June 2006 and June 2007 as president, he engaged India in discussions about nuclear trade, dedicated ANS historical nuclear reactors and research facilities, and wrote for *Nuclear Energy*, a briefing for government officials, industry representatives and decision makers, among others.

"He expects people to work as hard as he does," said Hans Gougar, INL Fission and Fusion Systems Department manager and McFarlane's ANS counselor.

McFarlane "defaulted" to a nuclear pathway during pursuit of his education. He majored in physics at the University of Texas. There, McFarlane cultivated relationships with graduate students and faculty. He joined Richard Freedman, a UT graduate, in plasma physics experiments during the summer. The experience marked McFarlane's first introduction to nuclear technology.

Photo: Harold McFarlane

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McFarlane graduated magna cum laude in 1967 and attended California Institute of Technology. Soon after, McFarlane met friend, fellow ANS member and future colleague Michael Lineberry, director of the Idaho State University Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering in Idaho Falls. McFarlane attended the school on an AEC fellowship that covered his graduate education expenses.

"I was able to pick the best school in the country and go there. One stipulation was that I had to get interested in nuclear something," McFarlane laughed.

McFarlane and Lineberry had many of the same classes and would later work together at Argonne National Laboratory on the Zero Power Plutonium Reactor. Lineberry said it was at graduate school that he first witnessed McFarlane's technical skill in physics and mathematics.

As a graduate student, McFarlane got his first taste of the ANS in Los Angeles, Calif., where he volunteered to be a projectionist at one of its meetings in 1970. A year later, he served as a student section adviser at New York University. As ANS president, McFarlane gave back to education through ANS on a greater level by organizing the ANS Special Committee on Federal Investment in Nuclear Education. The group made recommendations to the Department of Energy concerning the means necessary to ensure a skilled labor force for the nuclear industry.

McFarlane's ability to communicate with others led him to India during his presidential term. U.S. Embassy Counselor of Science and Technology Satish Kulkarni asked McFarlane to lead a nongovernmental mission to India with the goal of establishing a higher level of trust and communication between scientists while a nuclear agreement was being negotiated. The project was his main task for the year, and McFarlane dedicated months of his term to see its completion.

Photo: Harold McFarlane

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"The Bush Administration, with the support of Congress, is trying to re-engage India in the international nuclear technology market," said McFarlane. "They have a huge energy need which nuclear power plants can help satisfy."

India has been isolated from most global nuclear development. Much of that separation came from its decision to not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, preventing oversight and inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. McFarlane recognized the impressive indigenous nuclear program India has developed since then as well as the importance of the trade relationship between the country and the United States.

He began the mission in New Delhi. There, McFarlane spoke with U.S. Embassy Ambassador to India David Mulford, embassy individuals and several Indian government officials and businessmen. McFarlane then joined his team for visits to Tarapur, the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). He took this ANS delegation to India in January 2007. Putting the team together proved to be a challenge in itself.

"Getting these disparate scientists, support staff, ANS volunteers and other U.S. delegation members to all get together and make the trip a success was a feat of negotiation and tactics that was quite impressive because they all had their own ways of doing things, which weren't always Harold's," said Gougar. "So he had to find a way to work with them."

After discussions with India, McFarlane got what he had worked much of his term for - a record of the meetings that called for closer cooperation. "Included in that was a statement that we would continue to try to open up more avenues of communication," said McFarlane.

A President's Special Session was later held at the American Nuclear Society's national meeting in Boston in June for further discussion. Dr. Srikumar Banerjee, director of BARC, headlined the event.

But in addition to speaking with Indian representatives, McFarlane also got a chance to speak with security agents upon returning to the United States from a visit to the Belgium Nuclear Research Centre. Dr. Ait Abderrahim Hamid gave McFarlane a souvenir before he left. Passing through security, McFarlane was asked what was in his bag. He told them it was a model of a nuclear reactor.

"Being a president of the nuclear societycarrying something like this around gave the security people reason to pause," laughed Gougar.

McFarlane eventually made it through security. And despite the demanding schedule, McFarlane says there's never a better time to be ANS president.

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McFarlane is just a few months shy of a 35-year career with INL. But his presidency allowed him to vacate his comfortable place at the laboratory for a brief time to see the world.

He said he had recently spoken with his wife of 39 years, Mary Ellen, about all of the places he had traveled that begin with the letter "A." That list included Albuquerque for his first meeting as president, Argentina for the Latin American section meeting, Austria to enjoy what McFarlane called "great seating" at the general conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Australia for the Civic Basin Nuclear Council meeting to represent the United States, and Africa.

But McFarlane also found it important to keep a local focus during his time as ANS president. He visited as many local sections in the country as possible during his 12-month term, addressing topics from communicating nuclear issues to what nuclear energy needs to do to become a greener technology.

A slide in McFarlane's "Confessions of an Accidental President" PowerPoint presentation for the Idaho ANS section last May read, "Pet Peeve." The text on the slide said "People asking 'When are you going to retire?' rather than 'What are you going to do next?'"

At mid-afternoon on June 28, McFarlane's time as president officially ended.

"He has an uncanny ability to see the big picture; to strategize; to come up with the right strategic approach to issues and problems and that, I think, as much as anything else, will be his hallmark in looking back on his year as ANS president," said Lineberry. "He's certainly advanced the idea that the American Nuclear Society leads the world in the nuclear renaissance and has pushed that. And I think he'll be remembered for that."

McFarlane said he hoped he still had a job after being gone so long. But for him, the job is never done.

"Someone like Harold is never quite satisfied with the way things end up" said Gougar.

The American Nuclear Society was established in December 1954 at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. The international scientific nonprofit now has more than 11,000 members, including scientists, engineers, educators, students and administrators. It was founded upon the principle of uniting professional efforts in nuclear engineering and technology.

General Contact:
Teri Ehresman, (208) 526-7785,

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